



January 15, 2010

Envision San Jose Task Force

Re: Economic Strategy discussion reinforces need to choose an appropriate jobs-to-employed-residents ratio

Dear Envision San Jose Task Force members;

I appreciate the opportunity I had yesterday to talk with Kim Walesh at the City to understand the difference between jobs capacity and actual jobs under the various land use scenarios. As I understand it, the City anticipates based on past history that all housing that it plans for under any land use scenario it adopts, will in fact be built, but the same does not hold true for jobs. The City plans for a wide variety of places and options that could allow for jobs, while knowing that only some of those places and options will ultimately be viable for jobs development, depending on future economic conditions that we cannot easily predict. To further rephrase it in my own words, the City's jobs-to-employed-residents ratio for the various scenarios might be better described as a jobs-capacity-to-employed-residents ratio under each scenario, and the actual jobs-to-employed-resident ratio will not match the ratios that the scenarios describe.

The above is the economic planning perspective of City staff, assuming I described it correctly, but the City's environmental planning perspective is different. The EIR process requires it to assume that all areas it is planning for will, in fact, be built out as planned, so the City will assume in the EIR that all the jobs capacity will be utilized. At the same time, we environmental organizations have been encouraged NOT to worry about these ratios when, if realized, they would result in massive commutes from other areas to work in the city.

The environmental perspective, at least for Committee for Green Foothills, is that any ratio of actual jobs above a 1:1 jobs-to-employed-residents ratio will cause significant environmental harm. If San Jose were situated in an area that was jobs-poor and housing-rich, then adding jobs would reduce commutes, but in fact the reverse is true. For the surplus jobs above the 1:1 ratio, there is no place in the City for those workers to live. Everywhere north of San Jose also has insufficient housing, while Morgan Hill, Gilroy, and Hollister have strict residential growth limits. Those workers will have to live even further away and commute in, most likely from Central Valley. This will significantly affect the environment.¹

From our perspective, we worry that what the City perceives as unlikely may actually occur, and that we may see the City with a 1.5:1 ratio of jobs to employed residents, or something short of that but still destructive. The current process is our chance to affect the planning process, while at the same time we are told to not worry about what is being planned.

There is a potential solution to this issue that would allow the City to plan for whatever jobs capacity it thinks appropriate while maintaining control over the actual jobs-to-employed-residents ratio, at an environmentally appropriate level. The City should include an actual ratio safeguard for whatever land use scenario it chooses, so that the jobs number never surges ahead and exceeds an environmentally-appropriate level, which we believe would be no higher than 1:1. The City could plan for jobs capacity that is far higher, but if jobs for some reason outpace residential development, the safeguard would stop further development of new areas for jobs until residential development catches up. The safeguard would prevent the full jobs capacity from ever being built.

¹ It could be argued that given the regional housing shortage, ANY increase over the current baseline jobs-to-employed residents ratio would be environmentally harmful, but we also recognize that some change is likely.

We hope the City will consider this as part of its planning, especially as part of its environmental review. The alternative is for the City to acknowledge that actual jobs scenarios may likely be far lower than the majority of the scenarios currently under consideration, which raises the question of whether the City is analyzing the full, reasonable range of alternatives. Last May, we sent a letter to the City suggest they include what amounts to a reduced scope alternative based on the ABAG scenario, a 1:1 ratio with less housing and fewer jobs than ABAG proposes. If what we suggested in May is a likely future outcome for the City, and the City's own jobs capacity scenarios are unlikely, there is little justification for excluding our proposal from analysis.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss this with City staff and the Task Force, and we hope the City will consider these suggestions.

Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Schmidt", with a stylized, flowing script.

Brian A. Schmidt
Legislative Advocate, Santa Clara County